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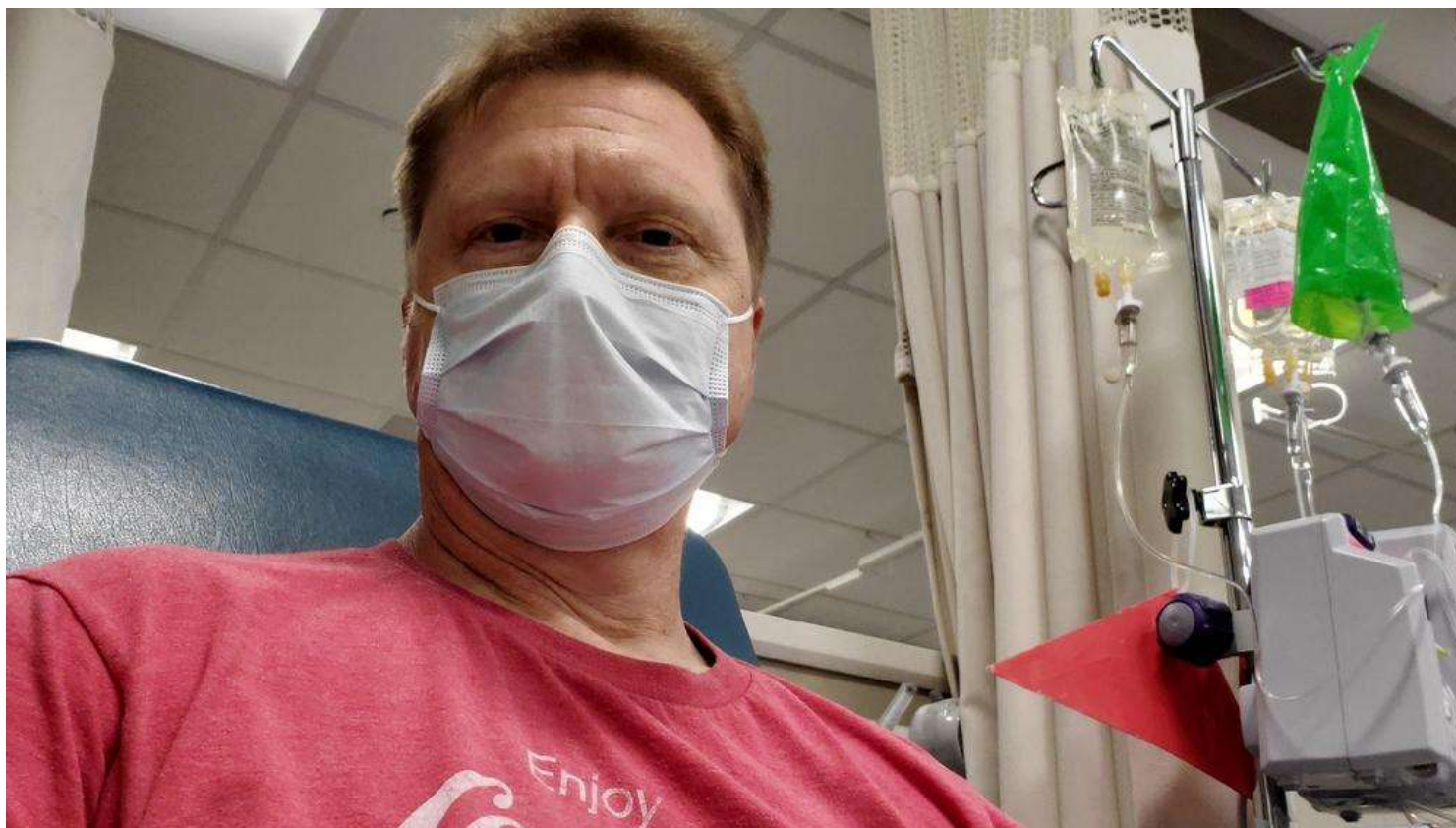
Thomas Hartle: How psilocybin eased my cancer suffering

As someone with a terminal diagnosis, it seems to me we're more comfortable talking about death than addressing issues like anxiety.

Thomas Hartle

5 min read March 7, 2021 - 1:26PM

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Thomas Hartle has stage four cancer and is the first Canadian to legally use psilocybin to treat his anxiety.

My name is Thomas Hartle and I am a Canadian who has been dealing with stage 4 colon cancer for the past five years.

I have undergone a significant number of different treatments and therapies as part of my condition. These therapies include medical procedures, naturopathic procedures, and a number of natural supplements. I am the

first person in Canada to legally use psilocybin to treat the anxiety I have experienced as a result of my terminal cancer.

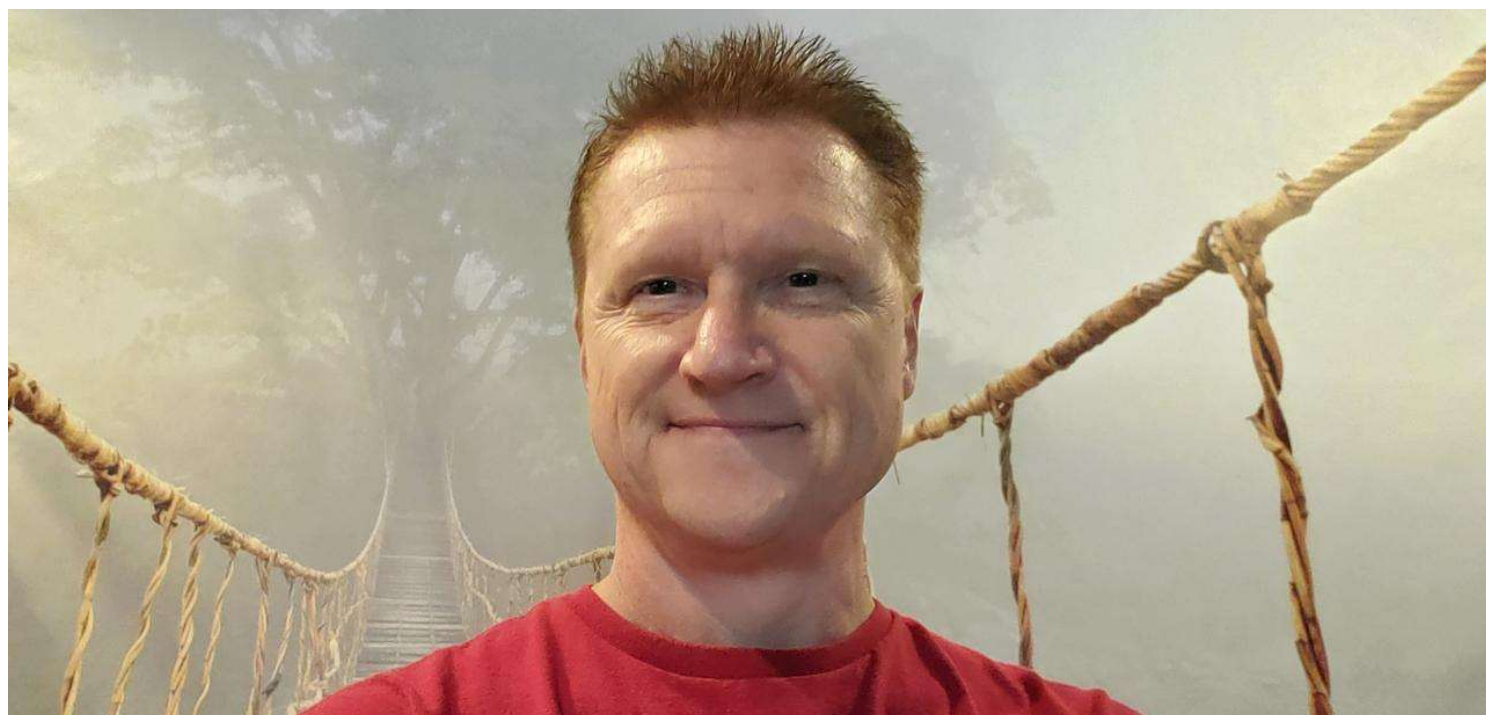
What we are considering here is not a discussion of the recreational use of a drug, which is a completely different matter from the use of any drug in a controlled clinical setting with medical supervision. A section 56 exemption granted to me by the health minister and the Office of Controlled Substances here in Canada shows the restrictions that are placed on the usage of psilocybin to ensure safety is a primary concern.

Some of you may be familiar with the kind of devastating physical effects that having stage 4 cancer can cause, but like so many things concerning mental illness, we often do not speak about the mental and emotional toll that cancer also imparts. We seem to be more comfortable talking about topics like death than we are to address issues like anxiety.

Mental health is somehow a taboo subject that makes people feel they are somehow weak or ashamed to seek help. My cancer has put me in a position where I simply do not have time left to ignore things the way that more healthy people are able to.

When you have a terminal illness, hearing talk about studies that may (or may not) produce any outcome in three or more years' time is the equivalent of saying that nothing will be done for the rest of your life. Nothing will improve for the rest of your life. You will not get any relief from the anxiety or depression for the rest of your life, so every minute you have left will likely be one where you are suffering.

With a hopeless prognosis like this, it isn't surprising to find that many opt for suicide instead of the extended suffering that a lack of options guarantees.





Thomas Hartle says psilocybin has eased his suffering.

HOW MY SUFFERING WAS EASED

My personal experience is that this suffering can be alleviated effectively and with almost no side effects or risk.

For someone like myself, factors such as the small possibility for a negative reaction from a psychedelic such as psilocybin are trivial in the face of the absolute certainty that stage 4 cancer kills nearly everyone who has it, often within 18 months.

Equally, as someone with a terminal diagnosis, I assure you that the possibility of experiencing some discomfort because of a “bad trip” is also almost laughable if you understand the level of daily discomfort cancer causes. This daily discomfort for me was greatly compounded by the anxiety I experienced over the uncertainty my life now has.

The most common question I am asked about my experience with psilocybin is usually concerning how a psychedelic substance could have any effect on something seemingly unrelated like anxiety. I can offer you the comparison of my experience between a traditional antidepressant and psilocybin.

In a nutshell, the antidepressant suppresses feelings for the duration that the drug is in effect. It removed the depths of negative feelings to some degree, but it also removed a proportionate amount of the peaks of happiness and well being. Without the drug, everything returned to its original state with the same busy thoughts that are inherent to having anxiety and depression. The use of this drug is a lifetime commitment. For some, this is an acceptable option, but for me, it was not OK to trade the rest of my life with anxiety for the rest of my life feeling numb.

By comparison, the psilocybin gave me a different perspective on my circumstances. It did not only change the way I was feeling, it changed the way that I thought about what was happening to me. I have used psilocybin twice, and at this point, I don't feel any need to use it again.

My results are typical, and as someone who has been extremely public about what most people would consider a personal matter, I have been approached by a large number of people who have shared their experiences with me on the therapeutic use of this medicine. This perspective shift and the life-changing result it has had for me is a theme that I have heard repeated by every patient I have spoken to.

Every experience is different, and some are certainly challenging from an emotional point of view. We have anxiety because we are dealing with difficult things. Dealing with difficult things is not easy no matter what mode of treatment you take.

TREATMENT NOT A CURE-ALL

I will not try to tell you that this is somehow a cure all for mental illness. Of course it isn't, and anyone who says so certainly does not have an understanding of how it works any more than someone who says that it has no medicinal value.

Information on the toxicity of psilocybin is readily available, as are studies by highly reputable universities. There is a large body of research that is available from the '60s prior to the criminalisation of the entire class of drugs. Many of the claims made against psilocybin such as its addictive potential are simply not supported by actual research.

For myself, my doctors, and my government, this was sufficient enough to give me the opportunity to see if it would also work for me in the same way that it worked for 80 per cent of people in the studies.

I am grateful that my government representatives were not only well informed, but also acted in a way that showed real human compassion. It would have been a simple matter for them to just say no and wait for me to die and no longer present a problem for them. Instead, they demonstrated that in medical matters, life changing medical decisions such as this are best left between a patient and their doctor.

While the government in no way condones or promotes the use of psilocybin for any purpose, it had the decency to recognise that I am an informed and intelligent adult who is capable of making choices about my treatment.

With cancer affecting almost half of us in our lifetimes, recognising symptoms early is critical to successful treatment.

It is my hope that my positive treatment outcome, and the positive outcomes of others would be enough to convince you that the possibility of alleviating the suffering of the terminally is worth exploring.

I would suggest it could also be a mechanism to provide the research data that would show that this is in fact an effective treatment.

Simply allow people who are terminally ill and who wish to use this treatment based on their own informed research to provide you with the evidence of their experience as recorded by their supervising medical practitioner. Allow them to use this medicine with protocols that have been established in other studies and treat that as your starting point in the development of protocols that reflect your own medical practices.

If it does not deliver a result like I have experienced, they are no further behind than before they started. If they get even a fraction of the relief I have, you will give them at least the chance to be present with their loved ones instead their illness.

There is nothing more precious to a family with a terminally ill member than quality time together.

— *Mind Medicine Australia lodged a submission with the TGA on Thursday regarding the rescheduling of psilocybin and MDMA*

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